

Debbie Benedict
On behalf of
The Montana Library Association

Joint Appropriations Subcommittee on Education

Public Testimony

January 17, 2013

Chairman Hollandsworth and Members of the Committee:

For the record, my name is Debbie Benedict. I am Director of the Meagher County City Library in White Sulphur Springs, and a member of the Montana Library Association.

I am here today on behalf of MLA and Montana libraries to speak to you about the critical need for an early literacy support position at the Montana State Library.

- Prior to February 2010 our library provided no programming to children 0-3
- Today we have held over 140 Books for Babies programs and we have parents and children who love spending time in our library's children's area
- 60 board and picture books on average are checked out each month
- Books for Babies children are demonstrating their love for books, can identify colors and count, are developing interaction skills and learning to share toys
- Mothers have developed friendships through the library and now meet to play at the park, babysit for each other, share toys and clothing
- Our early literacy effort is praised and recently supported with a \$1000 donation from a mother in our program
- 28 families have received early literacy back packs handmade by our ladies quilting group
- Hopa Mountain in Bozeman partners with us to distribute free board books every six months
- Early literacy is now a stated goal in our library's mission statement

This has happened because the State Library provided us:

- The Ready2Read initiative and website
- Hands-on training through conferences

- A book bin filled with board books and early literacy material
- Wooden blocks and community people
- A postman puppet

David Petersen, a writer and educator said: "There is no such thing as a leap into literacy." Our State Library has built a strong early literacy program but to sustain and continue moving forward it is critical to fund a full-time support position to provide three things at the very least:

1. Coordination between libraries as we develop and modify our programs,
2. Coordinate opportunities to develop professionally so we can provide excellent programming,
3. Outreach to partners and other important organizations who can support our efforts

It is also essential for libraries in our state, especially those who have no staff beyond the Library Director, to have a full-time person on staff in the State Library to work directly with on their early literacy program.

I see us sailing in this large "Early Literacy" cruise ship with 65 libraries providing programming in various compartments. What's missing is a full-time captain to navigate, give direction, lend a listening ear and provide fresh ideas and resources to pass along to our youngest patrons who are, after all, the future of our libraries and nation.

I urge you to include the new early literacy position for the State Library as a Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) in the budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

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